

her book directed to contemporary concerns: first, to discern whether the Franciscan's anthropology offers believers helpful language for expressing anxieties about bodily diminishment; second, to show how the body participates in the soul's soteriological journey; and third, 'to articulate a Bonaventuran spirituality able to harness experience of bodily diminishment for redemptive purposes, without glorying suffering' (p. 172). This is an ambitious agenda, one which, despite the many suggestions made in the volume, would seem to call for more effort to set out in a fully convincing way. What we can say is that the book demonstrates that Bonaventure's view of the role of the body in the aesthetics of salvation is certainly still worth pondering for contemporary theologians.

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The European encounter with Hinduism in India. By Jan Peter Schouten (trans. Henry Jansen). (Currents of Encounter, 62.) Pp. xii + 209 incl. 17 colour ills. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2020. €49 (paper). 978 90 04 42006 9

Western Jesuit scholars in India. Tracing their paths, reassessing their goals. By Francis X. Clooney SJ. (Jesuit Studies, 28.) Pp. viii + 289. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2020.

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The books under review describe how European travellers, traders and missionaries since the sixteenth century understood Indian religious traditions, primarily Hinduism. Lucidly written, both books present their findings in ways that will captivate students of religion, European imperialism and Orientalist knowledge. When reading about these European accounts, it is worth being reminded that they teach us more about the European gaze than about Indians and their traditions *per se*. No doubt, missionaries and travellers drew insights from local informers, but in the end they were the ones who narrated what they learned in ways that suited their interests and audiences. Both Schouten and Clooney are established scholars of Hinduism and Christian theology and are well positioned to contextualise the ideas of Italian, Dutch, French and English observers across many centuries.

Jan Peter Schouten introduces readers to a broad range of Europeans who came to India and formulated ideas about Hinduism. Some of the accounts he narrates showcase the exotic. We learn early on, for instance, about Marco Polo's 'fantastic fabrications' (p. 10), which include images of people with dogs' heads (cynocephalia); of the European fixation on sati (ritual burning of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands, pp. 13, 29, 31, 52, 168); and a custom in southern Burma where men 'had small metal bells placed under their foreskin' (p. 27). Undoubtedly, some Europeans treated India as a 'heathen' land. The author explains that at the time this term was not seen as a pejorative label, but as one that referred to any religion besides Christianity, Islam and Judaism (p. 64).

European perceptions of Hindu traditions were not monolithic. The Europeans discussed by Schouten interpreted what they saw in various ways. The author's discussion of European texts does not lend itself to the impression advanced in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York 1978) that they were simply recycling

viewpoints held by their predecessors with no direct encounter with an Indian Other (with the exception perhaps of the Dutchman Philippus Baldaeus, who allegedly plagiarised the work of Jesuits, p. 73). Neither does one come away with the sense that their findings were purely empirical. The Italian Jesuit Robert de Nobili appears to have held a unique interpretation of Hindu society based on his observations, circumstances and sources of information, as did the Venetian trader Nicolo De' Conti and the Dutch adventurer Jan Huygen van Linschoten.

With a distinctive flare for narrating the lives and perspectives of seventeenth-century Europeans, Schouten discusses missionaries who are more widely known to scholars of Indian Christianity, such as de Nobili, Bartholomeus Ziegenbalg, Jean-Antoine Dubois or the Serampore Trio (Joshua Marshman, William Carey and William Ward). He also draws attention to those who are less familiar. One might expect missionaries of the early modern period to be struck by Hinduism's radical difference from Western Christianity. Schouten, however, sounds out the ideas of men such as De' Conti who contended that Indians worship their deities in temples that 'look very much like ours' with feasts in which 'food was distributed to the poor' as in the days of Europe's 'pagan antiquity' (p. 27). The French Jesuit Jean Venant Bouchet (1655–1732) is known to have drawn connections between Hindu mythology and stories of the Old Testament (p. 99).

In contrast to Schouten, whose book introduces readers to both Catholic and Protestant Europeans who interpreted Hinduism, Francis Clooney, a renowned scholar of comparative religion, presents a collection of his own essays spanning several decades. The essays not only describe Jesuit encounters with Hinduism, but they also critique the merits and shortcomings of Jesuit approaches to other religions. This refreshing departure from non-evaluative scholarship brings to the forefront questions that captivate those interested in missiology, interreligious encounters and contextual theology.

The majority of Clooney's essays concern the Jesuit missionary, Robert de Nobili (1577–1656). De Nobili is known for developing the principle of cultural adaptation as he attempted to convert members of the priestly caste, Brahmins, to Christianity. Clooney's essays tend to be concise and to the point. They pose questions relating to de Nobili's assessment of Hindu beliefs, how to determine whether a particular instance of contextualisation is valid or not, or how to form reasonable judgements about missionaries who laboured under the socio-cultural and ideological assumptions of their day. Clooney's willingness to take on such critical questions makes his writing courageous and provocative (especially useful for classroom discussions) without compromising scholarly restraint or rigor.

In one of the early essays, Clooney describes how de Nobili contextualised the Christian message by portraying Jesus as a divine guru. This image appealed to Brahmin devotees of the Shaiva Siddhanta tradition, for whom the guru (spiritual teacher) is a central figure. The essay essentially describes how Jesuit asceticism merged with the ascetic virtues of this particular Hindu tradition. Jesus came, de Nobili taught, to help humans 'end desire for pleasure, power, and honors' (p. 27). This resonates with the local belief that the divine Shiva appears to his disciples in a concealed form as a human guru – a concealment of his divine nature adapted to human eyes. In the same way, de Nobili presented Jesus as God

concealed and yet revealed, who came to liberate people from worldly desire. This, Clooney explains, distinguishes de Nobili's project from the Gnostic one, which was more fixated on the imparting of secret knowledge to emancipate the soul.

Clooney's essays address more controversial aspects of de Nobili's legacy. De Nobili distinguished religious aspects of Hinduism – which lack 'truth and moral rectitude' (p. 104) – from civil matters, such as caste hierarchies, which he believed to be religiously neutral. As a result, de Nobili had no problems accommodating himself to the lifestyle of local Brahmins, which included their rules of purity and social exclusions. De Nobili deemed such accommodations necessary for imparting Christian teachings to influential Brahmins. At a time such as now, when anti-caste and anti-untouchability activism factors heavily in Indian politics and social sciences, Clooney pleads with readers to sound out de Nobili on his own terms before dismissing (or in today's language, 'cancelling') de Nobili for sanctioning oppression. Clooney's reasoning appears to align itself with de Nobili's by separating religion from 'both morality and social structure' (p. 110). Doing so allows us to legitimately critique caste without demonising Brahminical traditions, as many are tempted to do. This is a fair plea, but it stands at odds with the iconoclastic approaches of modern social reformers such as B. R. Ambedkar, whose critique of caste oppression required a rejection of its religious underpinnings.

Clooney's examination of Bouchet reveals the broad scope of Clooney's intellectual inquiry. As the leader of the French mission in south India, Bouchet also worked among Brahmins and carefully examined their embodied beliefs and practices. This distinguished him from de Nobili, who relied more extensively on Indian texts (p. 170). Bouchet's approach was more empirically based, but no less anchored, ironically, in the project of defending Catholicism against an increasingly secularising Europe. Bouchet maintained that Hindu beliefs and practices resembled the pagan world of the Mediterranean, while also weakly preserving biblical influence. His attempts to extend Hindu practices into Catholicism reenacted apostolic missions to the Greco-Roman world. At a time when Catholic beliefs were satirised by the likes of Voltaire, Bouchet hoped such cultural appropriation would enhance Catholic credibility in the eyes of European interlocutors (pp. 168–70).

These two books offer valuable resources for those interested in European encounters with Indian religions. Schouten offers an excellent overview of both Catholic and Protestant understandings of Hinduism with minimal attempts to situate them within a history of ideas. Clooney's essays, by contrast, are more focused on Jesuits, but pose broader questions about their missionary approaches in light of pressing contemporary issues of tolerance, cultural appropriation and justice.

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